

ADVERSE EFFECT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ON POLITICAL MODERNIZATION

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This paper¹, of which the central theme was first presented for discussion in another paper read to a Regional Cooperation for Development Seminar on the Role of Local Government in National Development held in Ankara in April 1967², intends to show, by way of sketched arguments, that local government, usually considered a useful element of bridging identification in the process of political development, may become a negative factor in this respect *under special circumstances*. The arguments, however, require a sound point of departure based on the analysis of the various elements involved in political modernization, especially in the context of developing countries where in some cases various factors may have led to a sudden introduction of universal suffrage at an early stage of development in the polity.

There is not much difficulty involved in obtaining a generally acceptable definition of «economic development». Various indices such as gross national product, per capita national income or the amount of electric energy produced per individual consumer, etc., all offer objective criteria for «measuring» at least the «economic growth», i.e. the quantitative aspect of economic development. The concept can further be «ideologically qualified» by introducing other elements of comparison such as the repartition of the national income and the distribution of the development cost

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- (1) Paper submitted to a «specialists' meeting» on the «processes of political modernization» at the Seventh World Congress of the International Political Science Association held in Brussels on 18-23 September 1967.
 - (2) See: «The role of local government in political development» in **Local Government and National Development**, published by the Institute of Public Administration for Turkey and the Middle East, Ankara, 1968, pp. 91-96.

among various social classes. But the term «political development» and its variation «political modernization» are much more relative. In the West they are often used, especially when speaking of the «non-western» world, to indicate the state of a society moving towards «modern patterns» in political life; these «modern patterns» being invariably those of the industrialized western societies: possessing certain institutions of conventional democracy such as free elections, political parties, parliaments, constitutional courts, etc; solving the conflicts of interests by way of non-violent actions or procedures based on a national consensus and achieving national goals in an atmosphere of stability by the sole use of these institutions and procedures. Thus, in this context, political modernization is presented simply as a matter of adopting the «political modernity» of industrialized western societies and «institutionalizing» them in a new environment.

On the other hand, especially when considered in the larger context of «national development», «political modernization» may sometimes mean the ability to create and manipulate a political machinery capable of achieving the most efficient combination of national resources, both human and material, in order to attain certain national targets of an economic and social nature. Then the concept acquires an almost «administrative» and «mobilizing» character: a better governmental performance and an increased capacity to carry out policies. This second conception, by putting the emphasis on «performance» rather than «style», invites less ideological controversy, but it is in no way sufficient to explain the difference between administrative development and political modernization.

The most satisfactory approach to the concept of political modernization may well be by way of a definition based on power distribution in a society. Development in the political sphere seems to be more closely and objectively related to the idea of «distribution» than is the case with the concept of development in economic and social context where the same idea acquires more salient ideological overtones. No system can be called «politically developed» unless it ensures a greater distribution of power among the members of a national community. However, this concept of power distribution is not necessarily linked with any specific form of political institutions or procedures. For instance, it would be only too easy to define the single party system as being a dictatorial machine of personal or ideological domination and from that to

conclude, as is very often done in countries with a long tradition of conventional democracy, that it indicates a lower degree of political development or modernization. But a less superficial observation would easily show that sometimes the existence of a single party founded upon the structural organization of the masses and offering machinery for their participation in governmental actions can ensure a greater distribution of political power or at least provide a better opportunity for taking part in the political decision-making than a system where political power is shared among a restricted political élite or confined to a competition between oligarchic party organisations. Whatever the nature of the integrative machinery ensuring a popular participation, a wider distribution of political power seems to be an essential step towards political modernization.

In this respect, the very nature of the national policies and goals to be achieved is a key question. Regardless of whether the problem is considered from a style or performance point of view, the ideology of the economic and social development remains the decisive factor. If economic and social development is set as a goal to be achieved by a mere mobilization of human and material resources and not by radical changes in the *structure* of the economy and society as a whole, then the «political demand» upon the system or, more precisely, the «load» that the political system has to bear is not so heavy. In an economic and social development policy not geared to «structural changes», any governmental action, whether at national or local level, is likely to encounter a «social opposition» weaker than that caused by radical policies attacking the very structure of the society.

In a national community where the development goal is set to be achieved by radical and structural changes, the «democratic virtues» of local government, often longly enumerated in books on decentralization and national development, appear to be quite illusory, especially from the point of view of creating a greater distribution of power. This is not the place to repeat these virtues which are well-known: providing a sense of participation, marshalling enthusiasm in behalf of development goals, adjusting national plans to local needs, enlisting the support of community leaders, etc. Viewed in this perspective, the development of a viable local government system may seem to ensure a better distribution of power because of the larger chance given to people for participation in the making of decisions that effect their daily life. How-

ever, here the close relationship between the distribution of political power in a society and the predominant economic and social structure is evident: the illusion of mass participation in political life, both at local and national levels, often conceals the real sources of authority: powerful groups, produced either by an unbalanced ownership in land or an archaic distributive system, etc., can dominate or distort the basic options and impose their own preferences as those of the masses. But this is not a point to be hastily proved in this paper. The contention here is that the sudden introduction of universal suffrage and multi-party politics in such a situation of underdevelopment has a long-range effect of disrupting this domination by powerful groups and that in such cases efforts to foster local government can only slow down or postpone this effect.

It is usually asserted that an interest in the affairs of one's immediate community, therefore in local government, is the first stage of «political maturation», a training for the complexities of national politics. This assertion, perhaps chronologically true in explaining the developments in a western context, can be quite misleading in the conditions of an underdeveloped society.

The sudden introduction of universal suffrage and national multi-party politics in an underdeveloped community throws the latter in the midst of an intense political life primordially evolving around concrete policies, usually converted into basic local needs. In the fierce fight for power at the national level, everything becomes involved in «national» politics and eager politicians do not hesitate to put the building of the village fountain on their list of promises. On the other hand, this bidding for local votes at the expense of the national treasury coincides with an unforeseen rise in the expectations of the people about the benefits likely to be derived from economic and social changes. To the local communities of our day it is no longer possible to say «do it yourself». The ordinary citizen is now conscious of the value of his voting power in national politics; he wants «the best and the most efficient» and he thinks that only the central government has the necessary resources and powers. And the political parties, in their struggle for power at the centre, tend to give the impression that only their victory on a national scale can provide the required service in the best and most efficient way.

Sometimes, secondary factors also contribute to the process whereby simple local needs are converted into national issues. In

Turkey, for instance, local elections at all levels (for mayors, municipal councils, provincial general councils, village and urban precinct headmen and councils of elders) are held on the same date throughout the country. They may even be combined with national elections, as will be the case for the local elections to be held simultaneously with the partial renewal of the Senate of the Republic in June 1968. Thus, with electoral campaigns on a «national» basis, local elections often become a national event, and the political parties, using the «national» facilities put at their disposal during the election period (allotted speech time on the radio, etc.) are not capable of stressing local issues. So, although the elections are local, the campaign is national. Furthermore, the same judicial council that administers national elections also supervises the local elections, and the central government bears the cost.³ This «national» behaviour in local politics is clearly shown by the following table where local election results fall in the trend of the change in major party votes between two national elections:

Party Votes in Local and National Elections (percentages)⁴

Parties	1961	1963 Local Elections			1965
	General Elections	General Councils	Mayors	Municipal Councils	General Elections
Justice Party	34.80	45.36	44.61	46.75	52.87
Republican	36.80	36.21	34.69	35.77	28.75
People's Party					
Republican	14.00	2.98	1.54	2.17	2.24
Peasants					
National Party					
New Turkey Party	13.70	6.54	3.57	4.22	3.72
Nation Party	—	3.15	2.54	2.73	6.26
Labour Party	—	0.36	0.56	0.63	2.97
of Turkey					
Independents	0.70	5.40	10.00	1.33	3.19
	100.00	100.00	97.54 ⁵	93.60 ⁵	100.00

(3) Mümtaz Soysal, *Local Government in Turkey*. Ankara: Publications of the Institute of Public Administration for Turkey and the Middle East, 1967, p. 39.

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 40.

(5) In these two columns, the percentages do not add up to 100 %. The Official Gazette where the figures were published does not give the explanation.

This sudden and direct «politicization» at national level, bypassing the intermediary stages, seems also to be confirmed by recent quantitative research on the Turkish peasantry: «... for many peasants, identification moves from largely intra-mural familial and village authorities to national figures and institutions without attendant awareness of, and moderate attachment to, the agencies that are supposed to mediate between the local and national levels.»⁶

But perhaps, this may not be an entirely regrettable situation in countries where economic and social development is a question of changing the structures and not merely one of mobilizing human and material resources without attempting structural changes. A trend in the opposite direction, i.e. politicization at the local level, would mean the perpetuation or even the strengthening of the very «structure» that prevents economic and social development: actions such as land reform, reorganisation of the markets, reshaping of the distributive system, basic educational reforms and the integration of the local and national economies are all tasks that can only be performed by the central authority and not by weak local governments. It is quite possible that the central authority may be content to perpetuate the old «structures» which it reflects. It may or may not be; but one thing is certain: the question of structures has to be decided and resolved at the centre, not at the local level.

In such a politicization that takes place at the national level, people gain cognizance of the elements involved in national power struggle by an arduous method of trial and error, full of disillusionments and betrayals, acquire a certain consciousness of their problems as a nation, put a certain pressure on the ruling élite and perhaps even begin to place the issues in an international context by realizing the impact of international interests upon national policies.

One can argue that this rapid politicization as a nation, beyond the stages of local and communal politics, has some undesirable effects such as inducing people to expect the central government to fulfill even minor functions of social welfare and public works at the lowest levels of the polity. But, in return, this unexpected deve-

(6) Frederick Frey, «Socialization to national identification among Turkish peasants», paper presented to the Advanced Seminar in the Social Sciences, August-September 1966, Bolu, Turkey, p. 20.

lopment makes them realize the necessity of influencing the national government for minor affairs. Perhaps at this stage they do not yet feel the need for structural changes which only the national government has the power to accomplish. Even in cases where national governments, under the impact of established interests, are unwilling to undertake them, the mere necessity of at least paying lip-service to the wishes of the people may effect the actions of the central authorities and thus may initiate a chain reaction unexpectedly leading to the required fundamental steps. It is quite true that here, as at the local level, the established elements may be able to have the upper hand and distort the basic options of the people. Therefore the vicious circle may still exist. But this is also a level where other elements of the society, more modernized and progressive, can more effectively exert their influence and undertake concerted and organized action.

Again it can be argued that this gaining of political consciousness at national level and the development of local government institutions do not necessarily exclude each other. But it is obvious that the more national government is involved in the daily life of the citizen, the faster the identification of the latter's interests with those of the national polity, which is a significant step in political modernization. Therefore the main causes of the present lamentations about local government in underdeveloped countries, namely the restricted character of the functions devolved to local authorities, the lack of interest in them, on the part of the citizens and the concentration of public funds in the hands of central bodies are not after all so bad if they ensure a more rapid national politicization and a closer integration of the individuals in a political life where the controversy tends to be on structural changes and not on trivial local matters such as the choice of trees for the embellishment of the streets. Perhaps here too, as with economic development, some countries do not need to repeat Western patterns and may even gain by skipping certain «stages of modernization» that are so dear to pattern exporters,